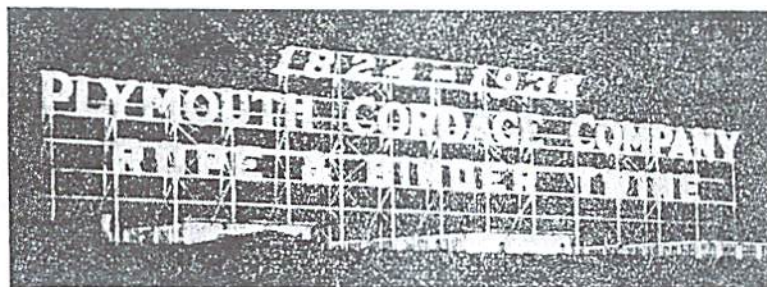


Rope Making One Of The Earliest Industries

— Records Show Early Ropewalk In Duxbury

*Was Closely Allied With Shipbuilding
Industry*

Today The Plymouth Cordage Company Only Rope
Manufacturers Left From The Early Days.



There is an atmosphere of romance about rope — it immediately suggests the sea and ships and sailormen — the very smell of it enlivens the fancy. Nothing symbolic of the sea could be complete without a piece of rope in it. It has joined the world together. It is enshrined in the sailor's heart because the cast-off mooring line is the last link with the land — last to leave and the first to go ashore. You "spin" a yarn — there's rope again! The ancient naval insignia, the fowl anchor, has a rope cable around stock and shank, not a chain cable, mind you, but a good stout piece of three-strand rope, and this famous badge has been adopted as the symbol of seafarers by all nations who use salt water to travel upon. And glance over the crests of the marine guilds, the harbor boards the pilot's associations and ten chances to one you will see rope figuring in the design. Gaze upon the tattooed arms of an old salt — a Sou' Spainer who has the barbaric decorations pricked into his cuticle by a fore-castle practitioner of the art and you will most surely find a piece of rope somewhere on his skin. A true-lover's knot, maybe, a reef knot perhaps, or a rope-work frame around the name of a heart's fancy or "My Dear Mother." An anchor and a piece of rope — these symbolize the sea. Nothing else does.

Since the landing of the Pilgrims in 1620 rope has been indissolubly linked with the name "Plymouth." It is an interesting fact that the first person who stepped on Plym-

cuth Rock held in his hand the rope painter of the small landing boat, thus joining the Old World to the New!

How many people have ever given a thought to the question of where rope comes from and how it is made, or realize what a variety of uses it is put to, and how dependent we are upon it in many of the everyday affairs of life? But let us suppose for a moment that the world were suddenly deprived of its supply of this very commonplace material and of its smaller relatives, cords and twine. We should then begin to realize the importance of a seemingly unimportant thing, and to appreciate the difficulty in getting along without it.

The art of rope-making is older than recorded history, for rope was the answer to one of man's earliest needs. The dependence of the early colonists on fishing and ship-building made the manufacture of rope one of the earliest industries in New England.

Bourne Spooner, when he brought about the establishment of a ropewalk in Plymouth back in 1824, put into it his experience as a rope-maker, his ability as a business man and his little capital of three thousand dollars. He probably did not realize what an influence his work would have in later days upon an important industry but, like his Pilgrim ancestors who could not possibly have foreseen the future consequences of their labors, he builded well. The foundations he laid have served upon which to build the world's largest cordage business.

From this modest beginning the Plymouth Cordage Company has shown consistent and continued growth. Today it is entering upon its one hundred and fourteenth year of business existence. Upon and about the spot where the ropewalk was established has grown up during the intervening years the complete and imposing cordage plant which compels the attention of everyone entering the historic town of Plymouth.

Here are combined rope-making knowledge and experience without parallel, with production, shipping, service and research facilities unequaled in the industry. Built into every length of Plymouth Ship Brand Manila are certain hidden elements which make it a better rope. They have been powerful factors in the product for more than a century. They are as important as good fiber and skilled workmanship.

One of these invisible elements is Purpose — the will to make a rope that is safe and economical to use — the determination to employ only selected materials in the manufacture of Plymouth Rope — the resolve to make the Ship Brand trade mark stand for rope of highest quality — the continued search for better materials and methods — the steadfast aim of this company to give its customers a rope value that cannot be surpassed. Purpose is one of the invisible elements in Plymouth Rope that have made it the trusted servant of man in hazardous work and everyday use.

Grouped about the plant are the various buildings serving as social and educational centers, and surrounding it the pleasant community of homes sheltering the Plymouth ropemakers and their families. And here we stop to pay tribute to the loyalty of the entire Plymouth organization to the ideals of the founders of this Company. An individual sense of pride and responsibility for the product he is making characterizes the Plymouth ropemaker. This sense of responsibility has been handed down through generation after generation and is as much a part of Plymouth Rope as the materials of which it is made. It is created by the management as one of the most valuable assets of the company, for character is reflected in the quality and service always to be found in Plymouth Rope and Twine products.

In the early days most of the product of the ropewalk found its way to uses upon the sea. Those were the days of the canvas-clad merchantmen which carried America's flag and fame around the world. To the mariner of that period his cordage was a matter of the utmost concern, it was the one thing which

must be above suspicion, and it must be watched and tended with the greatest care. This was the critical and discriminating group of buyers to which the Plymouth Cordage Company catered.

It is very apparent that Mr. Spooner's own desires and aspirations, no less than the exacting demands of his customers, shaped those early policies which would tolerate nothing but the best in materials and workmanship and which compelled the most careful watchfulness to see that standards were never relaxed and quality never by any chance slighted. It was not enough that the average be high — each individual coil must be its own perfect expression of its maker's character and skill.

With the passing of Bourne Spooner and his son, who succeeded the founder in the active management of the business, another family, father and son, were to carry on. In 1859 Gideon Francis Holmes entered the company's employ as office boy, and, as it proved, during the long period of fifty-two years his life was to be woven into the destinies of the industry in a most remarkable manner. Not only was he by character and training highly fitted to maintain the early established traditions but, by his far-sightedness, his wonderful ability as manufacturer, financier and merchant, and by his indomitable courage, was particularly well equipped to guide the business onward.

That Mr. Holmes' ability in dealing with the world's fiber markets amounted to no less than genius has been widely recognized. No less notable were his enterprise and fearlessness in developing the manufacturing and distributing sides of the business.

During all this time, by his remarkable personality and his capacity for leadership, Mr. Holmes was winning the respect of competitors and the admiration and confidence of customers and clients, in addition to the devotion of his own associates and employees. So it was that when one afternoon in January, 1911, after the close of a day's affairs, he peacefully laid down his responsibilities, hearts were saddened. The added responsibilities of management had kept pace with the business expansion. The purchase of materials and the distribution of greatly increased production, the finance of the business, and the many questions of manufacturing policy; each added its mental and physical burden upon the man in control of affairs. Seeking help, he found it in the person of his son. We can imagine the pleasure and comfort it gave

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him, and his trust and confidence was endorsed by the directors and stockholders of the Plymouth Cordage Company who, on January 24 of that year, elected Mr. Francis C. Holmes as Treasurer and General Manager. Thus Mr. Holmes the younger had the benefit of sixteen years' association with his father and was active in the last half of the period of plant expansion. He has shown the same marked ability which his father possessed as a merchant and manufacturer, and is justly looked upon today as the recognized head of the cordage industry.

Present-day officials of the Plymouth Cordage Company are: B. Weston Clark, President; Augustus J. Loring, Jr., First Vice-President; Francis R. Clark, Second Vice-President; Francis C. Holmes, Treasurer and General Manager; Ellis W. Brewster, Vice-Treasurer and Assistant General Manager; and Heron A. Apollonio, Clerk.

To make good rope one must start with good fiber. The fiber in general use today in the manufacture of rope, whether for marine use, construction work, oil field drilling or for general purpose work on the farm, is Manila fiber (Abaca), this same applying both to the plant and the fiber produced from its stalks. It grows extensively in the Philippine Islands, the tree-like plants ranging in height from eight to twenty feet. The close overlapping sheaths of the stalk, which measure from four to nine inches at the base, yield fibrous strips. These are peeled from the sheaths and afterwards scraped of the clinging pulp. The quality of the fiber produced depends much on the thoroughness with which the cleaning is done. After cleaning, the glistening fibers are hung on bamboo poles to dry in the sun. So time, which has toiled three years, produces the long, strong fibers, and with man to complete her part making rope.

When thoroughly dry, the hanks of fiber are loosely baled and carried to market. After the fiber is packed and graded in accordance with the Philippine Island Grading Law, it is compressed into bales weighing about two hundred and fifty pounds. Then, lightered to sailing ships, thousands of bales of fine Manila fiber start on their

journey half-way round the world to the plants of the Plymouth Cordage Company.

The fact that a rope is made of Manila fiber is, however, not enough to insure quality or service. There are many grades of Manila fiber produced from the same plant — varying from the bold, strong fiber obtained from the outside sheaths, the long white strong fiber from layers of the stalk, to the very fine, white fiber distinguished by the bright color and life — used in those ropes made for special purposes, such as yacht rope, lariat ropes, etc.

The prime factors in determining

grades are color, length, strength and texture. Furthermore, fiber that might be classed as high grade may be injured by careless cleaning and drying. Consequently, the market designation alone is not always a safe indication of the fiber's fitness for a certain purpose.

Because of these factors, the Plymouth Cordage Company examines and regrades the fiber on delivery according to its own standards, bringing to bear expert judgment, based on long experience, as to the spinning qualities of different fibers and service required of the finished rope.

So it is not enough to say "Manila" — we must consider who says it — the reputation and character of the manufacturer must be considered, the grades of fiber he is

known to buy, the quantity carried in stock in order to maintain a uniform standard of quality throughout the years. He cannot depend upon the offerings from day to day, but his warehouse must contain such amounts and such parcels of fiber as will assure his ability to make and deliver a standard product.

Fleeting glimpses of everyday activities bring clearly to mind many uses of the Plymouth Cordage Company's product and serve to impress us with the universal importance of Manila rope on land and sea and in the air. The steeplejack at work on dizzy heights, with the aid of dependable rope, works in greater safety than one would think. Likewise the deep sea diver entrusts his safe return to a life line of Plym-

outh rope. No yachtsman can disregard its overwhelming preference in equipping our cup defenders. Again and again this famous brand of cordage has crossed the finish line a winner. In the tradition of excellence Plymouth Rope is used again on all three contenders, the "Ranger," "Yankee," and "Rainbow." It has accompanied Admiral Byrd to Little America and has played an important role in the success of most notable scientific explorations. The biggest tent in the world is roped with Plymouth — a pledge of safety! Under the "Big Top" the aerial performers daily trust their lives to rope-rigged trapeze and safety net. Men who go down to the sea in ships — fishermen, to them rope means not only life but livelihood. The twirling lariat on western plans and in rodeo contests is a specialty product of the Plymouth Cordage Company and unmatched by competition.

And so it goes: rope, the binder, the connecting link between power and action. Without you the world would still remain apart, man's mon-

uments unbuilt. You speak a plain philosophy! The individual fiber, easily broken, gains strength with unity and defies man's power to burst asunder. Twisted strands! We owe a priceless debt to you.